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ABSTRACT

Because of growing recognition of the need to provide information on tech prep to college students preparing to become teachers, the Tech Prep Professional Development Consortium at Texas A&M University awarded a grant to the Department of Technology at the University of Texas at Tyler to develop curriculum materials and teaching aids for a tech prep unit to be delivered to professional development classes in teacher preparation. In addition, the class's instructor was to be become familiar with the principles of tech prep through a variety of means, including print materials, travel to tech prep sites in Texas, and attendance at tech prep workshops. A presentation on the importance of integrating practical examples into the teaching of academic subjects and on student enthusiasm and receptivity toward tech prep was delivered to students in the teacher preparation class. The need for additional training in ways of integrating practical examples into lessons was underscored by the problems the future teachers experienced when asked to develop lessons incorporating such examples. The insights and feedback gained from the initial presentation are being used to revise the teacher preparation program. (MN)

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Preparing Pre-Service Teachers for Tech Prep

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Introduction

Tech prep is a system of educating a target group of students at the secondary level so that they have a technical preparation as well as a rigorous academic regimen required to meet the identified job market of the foreseeable future. This target group includes students generally identified as not being college preparatory or as not being prepared in traditional vocational programs. Even though the target population is from the tenth grade in high school through the second year of junior or community college, the concept also reaches down into the middle school in the form of career guidance and even primary schools with career exploration. The key symptom that identifies this group is the lack of specific goals which might be met if the students were only exposed to the proper educational regimen.

Tech prep efforts in working with in-service teachers have resulted in some significant gains over the past few years as administrators and teachers have learned of the value of this new approach of dealing with the problems of the 50% of students who are following a general academic track in school but who do not plan to attend college and are not pursuing a vocational program. Available workshops for in-service teachers funded through the Carl Perkins Act have made the transition from traditional teaching and dealing with this group of students relatively efficient. Now it is time to give some attention to students in teacher preparation institutions so that they can be indoctrinated into tech prep concepts as well. Because of the vast amount of work that has already been done for staff development of teachers already in the field, the task of preparing

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a curriculum for those entering secondary school teaching will begin with some excellent resources.

Background

Tech prep began in 1985 with the book entitled *The Neglected Majority* (Parnell , 1985). That book brought a focus to the concept that has taken the educational community by storm. This call to action prompted Dr. Dale Parnell and his collaborator, Dr. Dan Hull, to write *Tech Prep Associate Degree: A Win-Win Experience* (Hull and Parnell, 1991). As a result, tech prep programs have been instituted in thousands of school districts across the country with varying degrees of success. Most notable among those showing success is the Richmond County School system in North Carolina. The articulation between this school system and Richmond Community College has set a standard that has been emulated by many schools (Robinson, 1993).

Woodland Hills, California, also stands out as an excellent example of tech prep in several ways. This school is the only one in California that meets all of the state's excellence criteria. The integration process works well there because practical applications are made in the academic classes. Academically talented as well as the non-college bound students are taking the integrated classes. They are attracted to these classes because the information is presented in a way that relates to real life situations. Students at Woodland High School have found that vocational education and academic programs are not alternative programs; they are complementary of each other (Sharp, 1993).

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Tech Prep for Pre-Service Teachers

Ongoing efforts have been made for several years to indoctrinate both vocational teachers and academic teachers into the workings of tech prep. These efforts have been successful and are becoming even more successful as teachers and administrators are becoming aware of the rewards of tech prep for teachers, for administrators, and most importantly of all, for the students.

Because of these successes, the need became evident for providing information to college students preparing to become teachers. A grant was provided by the Tech Prep Professional Development Consortium, Texas A&M University, to the Department of Technology, The University of Texas at Tyler, to develop curriculum materials and teaching aids for a unit on tech prep to be delivered to a professional development class in teacher preparation. In addition, the professor of this class was to be indoctrinated in the principles of tech prep through a variety of means: books and copies of articles on tech prep, travel to tech prep sites in Texas, and attendance at tech prep workshops. Although not all facets of the indoctrination process were completed in the initial phase of the project, significant gains were realized such as the presentation in the teacher preparation classroom of the importance of integrating practical examples in the teaching of academic subjects, the realization of the enthusiasm and receptivity of students toward tech prep, and the intense desire teacher preparation students have to make learning more accessible to all students.

One interesting aspect of the presentation of the material to the students in the teacher preparation class was that an assignment was made to present an outline of a lesson showing how practical,

everyday problems could be integrated into classroom teaching. The students were told that they could choose any subject they wanted for this assignment. The results were abysmal! This is no reflection on the intelligence or the ability of the students, rather it only emphasizes one of the main points that tech prep addresses: the need to train teachers (and in this case, teacher preparation students) in ways of integrating practical examples into the lessons.

The insights and feedback gained from the preparation of the curriculum material and the teaching aids along with the experience of presenting the material in the classroom will provide a point of departure for revising the materials and the processes for additional applications in other classes.

This project paves the way for more study and preparation of materials suitable for instructing students going into teaching. Tech prep as an identifiable entity may or may not be around for a significant period of time, but some of its basic principles such as the integration of practical examples into the teaching of most subjects and the development of teams so the student can have the benefit of organized cooperation of teachers in different subjects is so important that it must outlive the normal lifespan of a program.

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